

**COMMUNICATIONS ANNEX  
TO  
MADISON COUNTY  
DISASTER & EMERGENCY  
PLAN**

**(April, 2007)**

# **COMMUNICATIONS ANNEX**

## **PURPOSE**

Breakdowns in communications have long been recognized as contributing directly to the deaths of emergency responders of all disciplines as well as leading to the overall failure of incident operations to achieve optimal success. The purpose of this annex is to provide information on establishing, using, maintaining, augmenting and providing backup for Madison County public safety communications, particularly as relates to equipment and procedures to be used during disasters and emergency operations. In so doing, it lays the groundwork for a clear and effective emergency communications plan.

Major incidents have the potential to involve multiple response agencies from a wide assortment of private, local, state and federal jurisdictions. Two or even more dispatch centers may be involved. The potential for confusion or breakdown in communications is enormous, therefore county personnel must remain very aware of this plan and the implementation procedures that support it. Every bit as importantly, those procedures and plans must be followed.

## **SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS**

### **A. Situation**

1. By its very nature, public safety communications are related to support of varying degrees of crisis and risk. Some are encountered by the public safety responders and providers as a matter of day to day routine. Madison County also faces a number of hazards which may cause extraordinary emergency situations to come into being. Section 6 of the main body of this Disaster and Emergency Plan presents a summary of the most apparent of those hazards and their possible impact. The county Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan similarly assesses the nature of some of those hazards as does the Madison County Homeland Security Strategy.

2. The Madison county public safety communications system includes land lines, cell phones and satellite telephone capability; however its primary component is its radio voice and data communications sub-system. Public safety radio provides for paging, two-way simplex operation and the use of dual-frequency repeaters located at both fixed and temporary sites. These units may be accessed from portable, mobile and fixed stations, however coverage is not 100% of the area. The various independent and quasi-independent sub-systems are managed and integrated at the Dispatch Center in the Sheriff's Office with a primary transmitter site located prominently just outside of Virginia City. The County is actively pursuing technological and administrative options aimed at improving the overall public safety communications capability using the provision of the Interoperability Montana (IM) initiative and the findings of the Interoperable Communications Assessment and Plan developed in 2005 by the South Central Montana Interoperability Consortium (SCMIC) as a guide. Complete interoperability is always a primary goal. Reliability, through redundancy and a robust infrastructure, will always be a primary factor in achieving that goal. It should be recognized that large-scale emergency

operations usually require a communications capability beyond the normal capacities of the equipment the county will routinely have available to it, regardless of what upgrades may have been made.

3. Several organizations within the county have proprietary communications systems. While they frequently have limited capability and range, they may well remain viable at a time when the primary public safety communications system is either overloaded or operating at less than optimum capacity. These systems may offer potential for augmentation of the primary system, however and are found in the Madison County Resource List.

## **B. Assumptions**

1. Large scale emergency operations may be generally expected require a communications capability that exceeds the normal public safety communications capabilities of the County. In such instances it may be necessary to obtain additional equipment, personnel and/or other resources from other public agencies than those of Madison County itself and even from the private sector. The spontaneous voluntary support of ham radio operators, radio clubs, and private organizations such as the larger developers, operating mines, etc. may well be offered and should be solicited and utilized as needed. Such operations may present surprisingly sophisticated communications capability.

2. The number of available communication channels available for use by responders is very limited. During periods of heavy activity these channels may well become saturated with radio traffic. Dispatch will work with the incident commander(s) to assign tactical incident frequencies based upon geographic and functional separation.

3. Lack of communications discipline and proper technique can bring the most technologically advanced communications system and the associated response capability to its knees in an emergency. A well thought out and thoroughly integrated communications plan will be responsive to unanticipated developments and stresses on the system, but only if its principles and procedures have become an intuitively utilized tool of the emergency responders involved.

4. The general assumption is that the communications system will survive and/or withstand the effects of disasters and emergencies. A portable station radio is maintained by the Department of Emergency Management to give a degree of back-up in the event Dispatch cannot operate, however its deployment will require time and may need the augmentation of other mobile radios and/or portable repeaters. This annex is generally based upon the assumption of survivability. However should the alternative occur, applicable portions of this document should be utilized in furtherance of resourcefulness and initiative on the part of all concerned.

## **CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

### **A. General**

1. In all county emergencies, large or small, communications between and among the field forces at a specific incident scene; assisting units; the Emergency Operations Center (EOC); control centers of emergency response organizations; mass care facilities; hospitals; ambulances and their dispatch or control stations; amateur communications networks; adjacent or assisting jurisdictions; the state EOC; and any federal or military units will operate under the provisions and procedures of the Incident Command System (ICS) and in compliance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

2. The public safety communications system must be capable of providing rapid and reliable means of communication in support of emergency operations under conditions that are less than ideal. It is very important, therefore, that everyone involved in an incident, regardless of its magnitude, observe strict communications discipline and utilize authorized procedures in the use of all communications equipment. Radio codes shall not be used in transmissions when more than one agency is involved in an incident. Plain text shall be used at all times. Keep the necessary people informed. Make sure the transmissions are clear, succinct and to the point.

### **B. Radio Message Priorities**

Before transmitting, individuals should monitor the selected channel for a short period to avoid creating interference. The following types of radio traffic have priorities in the order shown:

1. Medical emergencies
2. Imminent threat to life or property
3. Communications with aircraft engaged in tactical operations
4. On-scene tactical communications
5. Incident support communications
6. Other (Primarily administrative)

### **C. Interoperability**

1. To ensure interoperability, all response agencies involved in an incident will follow the Montana Mutual Aid Radio Plan and the Montana Mutual Aid and Common Frequencies Handbook, which provide guidelines for radio frequency usage. Each agency must have authorization from the Montana Department of Administration for the use of these frequencies, and must abide by the conditions of the permit. Similarly, participants desiring to use proprietary frequencies or those of neighboring jurisdictions must obtain written authorization to do so (in advance) from the licensee.

2. In accordance with provisions of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and its Incident Command System (ICS), all emergency service providers are to use clear text for radio communications. This means no 10-code or other unauthorized code is to be used during emergency operations. In addition, the common terminology provided for by ICS should be used to identify or refer to various types of resources, actions or portions of the infrastructure.

## **D. Channel Assignment and Designation**

There are three functional types of messages: Command, Tactical and Administrative. In general, channel designation and usage follows a similar pattern. Until such time as modification may be specifically determined to be necessary by the Incident Commander or the Madison County Sheriff, the designations and common usage for Madison County channels are as set forth herein.

1. **COMMAND CHANNELS** Command channels are primarily used for radio traffic between Dispatch (the base station) and field resources. All initial response dispatching, incident support and administrative functions usually will take place on command channels. When traffic volume permits and/or the events involve relative few responders for a limited period of time, tactical traffic may, under the coordination of Dispatch, be carried on these channels as well.
  - A. **DIRECT**: This channel is the preferred command channel for all public safety services users, including Dispatch, whenever its coverage is adequate to the task or when this channel has not been specifically designated for other use.
  - B. **NORRIS REPEATER**: This channel is primarily used for public safety services on the east side of the county, principally the Madison Valley, including the Jack Creek drainage and north of the Norris Pass. It also may be useable in the Reynolds Pass area and for parts of the southern Ruby Valley.
  - C. **TABLE MTN REPEATER**: This channel is designed to cover the western half of the county when direct, simplex communications are not possible. In general its coverage includes the western portion of the county from Whitehall to south of the Ruby Dam.
  - D. **LONE PEAK REPEATER**: This channel is designed to provide command communications for the Madison County portion of the Big Sky area including the upper portions of the Jack Creek drainage.
  - E. **CAMERON/FH#2 REPEATER**: This is the preferred command repeater for the southeastern part of the county.
  - F. **BALDY**: This repeater is a back-up repeater and is normally not in operation, however it may be turned on by Dispatch as needed. It shares frequency/tone with Table Mountain, hence its use could result in interference problems.

2. **TACTICAL CHANNELS** All scene-of-action radio traffic between incident resources should take place on tactical channels. In general, tactical channels are the Montana colored mutual aid channels except in the case of single-agency events during which an agency's licensed proprietary frequency may be used. Use of the colored channels is governed by the guidelines promulgated in the Mutual Aid and Common Frequencies Handbook published by the Montana Department of Administration.

## **Usage Guidelines**

The Incident Commander or a designated communications assistant are usually the only persons at an incident that need to communicate with Dispatch on the command channel. All other resources should use assigned tactical channels to conduct operations on-scene. Because of the overlap in coverage of the various repeaters and the limited

capacity of Dispatch, messages on the command channel should be as concise as possible, consistent with the need for clear information exchange.

## **ORGANIZATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. General.**

The overall responsibility for providing for public safety communications capabilities rests with the senior elected official of the jurisdiction involved. This would normally be the Board of County Commissioners and, as appropriate, the jurisdictional resource manager of the incorporated town(s) or non-governmental entity involved. Typically, and by acceptance of the provisions of this Plan, the mayors and city councils of the County's incorporated towns agree to accept the preeminence of the Madison County public safety organization in the overall coordination of public safety communications and to provide for the majority of such capability in so far as possible and as may be agreed upon by pertinent mutual agreement. The County Commissioners provide general guidance for communications programs and activities and may provide for the position of a County Public Safety Communications Coordinator.

### **B. Responsibilities.**

#### **1. The County Commissioners shall:**

a. Appoint a Public Safety Communications Coordinator, either as an individual position or as part of the responsibilities of the Director of Emergency Management and appropriately support him or her in the performance of duties assigned.

b. Monitor the budgetary requirements for operations, maintenance and inevitable replacement of public safety communications equipment and the system as a whole to ensure an adequate level of support to this key aspect of public safety services.

#### **2. The Public Safety Communication Coordinator (PSCC) shall:**

a. Coordinate and facilitate public safety communications-related activities and capability enhancement throughout the county on a day-to-day basis. In so doing, he or she will play an active role as a member of the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC).

b. Advise and assist the Board of Commissioners on matters relating to public safety communications.

c. When notified of an incident or emergency situation that may place demands on the communications system which could exceed that of routine daily operations, report to the EOC/Dispatch center to manage, facilitate and assist.

d. Manage the communications section in the EOC when activated and supervise the personnel assigned to it. In all cases, the PSCC will be guided by the tenants of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). He or she will encourage adherence to established procedures and protocols in so far as possible while also ensuring appropriate screening, logging and routing of information.

e. Support media center and/or other PIO communications operations consistent with the primary demands of the communications system to support field operations.

3. The Director of Emergency Management shall:

a. c. Advise the Board of Commissioners as to emergency management implications of public safety communications developments as they may occur.

b. When appropriate, activate the communication section in the EOC. Ensure that the section has the necessary capability for sustained operations. In the event that the Public Safety Communications Coordinator is not available, carry out the responsibilities assigned to that position.

c. Implement and maintain emergency communications procedures as necessary.

4. The Madison County Sheriff shall:

a. Supervise the day-to-day operation, maintenance and administration of the county public safety communications system, including Dispatch.

b. Keep the county Board of Commissioners closely apprised of the needs and capabilities of the county public safety communications system across the entire spectrum of public safety services.

c. Work closely with the PSCC to ensure optimum development and improvement of the public safety communications system.

5. All local government departments and agencies that are involved in or support emergency response operations (Fire, Law Enforcement, Public Works, Emergency Management, PIO, Public Health, EMS and medical care providers, SAR, etc.) shall:

a. Maintain communications equipment and follow established procedures for communications within their organizations both during emergencies and on a day-to-day basis.

b. During emergency operations, keep IC and the EOC (when activated) appropriately informed of their operations and maintain a communications link whenever possible.

c. Train, exercise and routinely utilize standard communications operating procedures as set forth in this and other applicable county policies, procedures and regulations.

d. Coordinate with the Public Safety Communications Coordinator and the Sheriff in the maintenance, procurement, programming and other procedural matters related to county communications equipment and capabilities, including training in the use thereof.

e. Keep EOC and Dispatch informed of operations & capabilities. Maintain a communications link at all times.

6. The Citizen Corps Council Administrator shall:

a. Develop and maintain a cadre of CERT graduates whose interest and training qualify them to augment the identified team of communications specialists and first responders during significant incidents and emergencies.

b. Train all CERT volunteers in communications procedures so that they may assist responders in time of disaster or emergency. Actively seek to integrate such volunteers into the emergency planning of agencies and entities within the county.

## **DIRECTION AND CONTROL**

### **A. Command & Control.**

1. The Madison County Sheriff is responsible for the operation of the Public Safety Communications system. As such, he or she administers and supervises communications activities and advises the County Board of Commissioners on matters relating thereto. The Sheriff will develop, maintain and implement a viable operations, maintenance and improvement program while actively seeking financial and other resources necessary to further that program, working closely with the PSCC..

2. The Public Safety Communications Coordinator will maintain a close local liaison between the County Sheriff, The Director of Emergency Management and the Board of Commissioners in order to coordinated development and implementation of an ongoing program of public safety communications improvement. When the Emergency Operations Center has been activated and at such other times as may be appropriate, the Public Safety Communications Coordinator shall supervise the operations of the system and seek to facilitate the activities of the Incident or Unified Command.

### **B. Incident Communications Plan.**

Preparation of a written communications plan is an essential first step towards providing a workable tactical communications system. In general, the simplest system that will meet all requirements will be the best system. Such a plan should be drawn up for each operational period and should include:

1. Radio Communications frequencies, tones, channel names, purpose and the like. ICS Form 205 or similar documents will greatly facilitate the promulgation and understanding of this information.
2. Telephone facilities and their location.
3. Number of lines available.
4. Assignment of responsibilities for circuit and equipment control
5. How to obtain maintenance or equipment replacement support.

## **ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT**

**A. Records.** The Madison County Sheriff shall supervise and administer the maintenance of files and records as proscribed by law and applicable regulations. He or she shall make available the files and information maintained in the performance of his or her duties for post-incident analysis and educational purposes whenever possible. When the EOC has been activated and at such other times as the Public Safety Communications Coordinator shall be in charge of operations of the communications system, he or she will coordinate and facilitate the maintenance of files and records on behalf of the County.



## **ANNEX MAINTENANCE**

The Public Safety Communications Coordinator is responsible for developing and maintaining this annex. The annex will be reviewed annually. Recommendations for updating and alterations shall be made to the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) for forwarding to the Board of Commissioners at that time or such other time as may be necessary.

## **REFERENCES**

Montana Code Annotated, particularly MCA 53-1-705 and all of Title 2, Section 6  
State of Montana Mutual Aid & Common Frequencies handbook (*Prepared by the Department of Administration under direction of the Governor*)  
FEMA, *Guide to All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning* (SLG 101)  
DHS, *National Response Plan* (NRP)